

WEB SITE CHECKLIST

On this page, we've collected the key Web design principles presented in this chapter. Use this checklist to evaluate the online newspapers you encounter — or, more importantly, to critique your own.

LAYOUT & DESIGN

YES NO

- Is the home page attractive, inviting and well-organized?
- Can readers easily differentiate between promos, ads and live news?
- Is there a clear hierarchy of news content on the home page?
In other words, is it instantly obvious which stories are most important?
- Do the headlines and design of the top stories on the home page show creativity or flair (rather than being predictably pre-formatted)?
- Does the site's design style match the personalities of its readers?
- Do pages use attractive, appropriate and consistent colors?
- Does the site avoid unnecessary blinky-floaty-glowy animated effects?
- Does the text on most pages avoid becoming too wide and wordy?
- Does the site use consistent styles for the basics: headlines, bylines, subheads, etc.?
- Does the site use consistent styles for the extras: graphics, liftout quotes, sidebars, etc.?

USER-FRIENDLINESS

- Does the home page download quickly?
- Does the site offer a "Sunday Brunch"-style menu of stories, visuals, reader forums and multimedia options (audio, video, animated graphics, etc.)?
- Does the site provide services, stories and sidebars not available in the print newspaper?
- Are users always a single click away from the home page or main section fronts?
- Is a concise index constantly viewable, from any page in the site?
- Does the flag appear atop every page, to remind users where they are?
- Are all images necessary? Tightly cropped? Compressed into GIF or JPEG formats?
- Does the site function successfully with all images turned off in the browser?
- If someone visits this site looking for a specific feature, will it be easy to find?
- When reading the text of stories, do users find helpful links that expand/explain topics?
- Can users search the newspaper's back issues? Are the archives reasonably complete?
- Does the site provide useful links to related resources *outside* the newspaper?
- Is it easy to send e-mail feedback, news tips or letters to the editor?
- Most importantly: Will visitors tend to bookmark this site and visit it again?

SITE MANAGEMENT

- Does the site design feel current? (Has it been upgraded within the past year?)
- Are all stories time-stamped (or, at the very least, dated)?
- Are all stories and headlines well-edited?
- Do all pages share a well-coordinated system of navigation controls, typography and color style throughout the site?
- Are there annoying technical glitches (temperamental graphics, expired links, pages "under construction") that might frustrate users?
- Does the site provide newsroom phone numbers and addresses, for readers who want to do more than send e-mail?
- Are the publication name, Web address, date and copyright notice posted on every page (and do they appear on all printouts of stories)?
- Does anything on this site violate someone else's copyright?